



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

15 June 2017

Financial Assurance Review
Queensland Treasury
PO Box 15216
CITY EAST QLD 4002

Via email: financial.assurance@treasury.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Better Mine Rehabilitation for Queensland: Discussion Paper (Part of the Financial Assurance Framework Reform Package)

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland primary producers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Flower Association
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council
- Queensland United Egg Producers.

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to Queensland Treasury on the 'Better Mine Rehabilitation for Queensland: Discussion Paper' which is part of the 'Financial Assurance Framework Reform Package'.

The united voice of intensive agriculture



Background

QFF understands that the purpose of this document and supporting process is to introduce major reforms to mine rehabilitation and the financial bonds for mines to better protect the environment, taxpayers and adjacent landowners from future liabilities arising from abandoned and/or poorly managed facilities and in other circumstances where a mining company cannot fulfil its rehabilitation and environmental obligations.

The package of reforms includes:

- A redesigned financial assurance framework tailored to operators based on their size and level of risk
- Pooling financial assurance from mining companies into a rehabilitation fund
- More options, such as insurance bonds, to make it easier for miners to provide their financial assurances
- More funding to rehabilitate abandoned mines
- Measures to ensure mined land is rehabilitated progressively rather than toward the end of a mine's life
- Regular checks and reporting on progressive rehabilitation
- Better planning for rehabilitation and regular monitoring and reporting
- More realistic calculation of rehabilitation costs and a phase out of discounts on financial assurances for miners.

QFF provides this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

Overview

QFF welcomes the production of this document and the approach taken to protect the environment, taxpayers and landowners from future liabilities arising from abandoned and/or poorly managed mines.

The Executive Summary states that the *“discussion paper sets out the government’s response to the QTC Review’s recommendation on the need for rehabilitation policy enhancement. It presents a proposed mine-site rehabilitation policy that all mined land should be rehabilitated so that it is able to sustain another use such as grazing, agriculture, ecosystem services or infrastructure”*.

QFF strongly supports appropriate and timely (progressive where possible) remediation of mining impacted land. As such, QFF seeks further clarification on the decision-making criteria for determining post-mining land-use. The required outcomes for rehabilitation are not clearly articulated in the document, rather rehabilitation being solely a matter left for the Environmental Impact Statement. If rehabilitation is left to the discretion of the mine/project operator, then remediation decisions may be unduly weighted to, or decided on, cost.

On page 33, rehabilitation is defined. It states that *“Rehabilitation does not necessarily mean that the land will be returned to the same condition or the same use as prior to mining activities”*.

Where ever mining disturbs agricultural land, QFF advocates for the land to be fully restored to its former agricultural quality. This is not necessarily the same as land use. For example, there is a considerable difference in the types and quality of agricultural soils and the additional factors which make agriculture viable (such as rainfall, topography etc.). Agricultural productivity is directly related to the quality of a soil and prevailing climatic conditions.

There is a common misunderstanding about the quality of agricultural lands, with even productive grazing lands often perceived as low value land by critical decision makers. Not all grazing or cropping

country is the same. Land condition is the capacity of land to respond to rain and produce useful crops or pasture – land condition must be restored to previous values or improved for any mine restoration on (former) agricultural land. This may need to include restoration of landform and catchment hydrology (including surface and ground waters).

Levels and the extent of remediation may be dictated by external factors such as access to water. Such criteria must be included in the early decision making process of the various administering authorities whether to grant initial permission for a new mine.

QFF notes the 'Proposed Policy Statement for Mine-Site Rehabilitation in Queensland' (see page 13). Whilst in agreement with most of these bullet points, QFF questions the following statement:

"There are limited circumstances where it may not be possible or preferable to rehabilitate some areas of a mine site to sustain a future post-mining land use. This will be restricted to where:

- *rehabilitating the area would pose a greater environmental risk than not rehabilitating, or*
- *the environmental risks from the area are localised, and*
- *the cost of rehabilitation would be so excessive as to be not in the public interest".*

In these cases, QFF questions whether permission for any new mining development which offers no rehabilitation (for whatever reason) should be granted.

Finally, QFF does not agree with the opening statement made on page 31: *"Although land disturbance by mining is relatively small compared to other uses such as agriculture"*.

The comparison of agriculture to mining is not appropriate. The patterns of land disturbance and impacts to landform, and the subsequent range of land uses (permanent waste disposal – tailing mines, construction of surface structures, removal of soil strata and landform etc.) resulting from mining activities have no similarity to agricultural uses. QFF requests that this statement be removed.

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer